Construction
Industry
Advisory
Committee

Guidance on health and safety advisory services for the construction industry

Part 1 The need for advice and the services available

Contents

Foreword

Introduction *1*

Principal recommendations *1*

The need for health and safety advice *1*

Meeting the need for advice *3*

Assessing the effectiveness of the service *4*

Appendix 1 Practical examples of the need for expert advice *5*

Appendix 2 Example of job description *6*

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Foreword

The guidance contained in this publication was prepared by the Construction Industry Advisory Committee (CONIAC), in consultation with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). It advises firms on how to approach the question of the provision of health and safety advisory services rather than giving precise advice on how to comply with legal requirements.

Advisory committees are appointed by the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) in pursuance of the Commission's powers under Section 13(1)(d) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. Under HSE chairmanship, CONIAC comprises senior representatives from the construction industry nominated by both the CBI and the TUC; the committee's terms of reference are:

'To consider and advise the Commission on:

(a) the protection of people at work from hazards to health and safety arising from their occupation within the building, civil engineering and engineering construction industry and the protection of the public from related hazards arising from such activities;

(b) associated matters referred to them by the Commission or the Health and Safety Executive.'

V C Jordan
Chairman Construction Industry Advisory Committee

Introduction

1 The continuing high number of accidents resulting in serious and fatal injuries in the construction industry highlights the need for all construction firms, irrespective of size and type of work undertaken, to implement effective accident prevention policies. To do this, and to overcome occupational health problems, many employers have found expert health and safety advice to be essential. The benefits to be gained include reduced pain and suffering, improved working conditions, better appreciation of and compliance with legal requirements, and reduced costs.

2 Part 1 of this two-part guidance is intended to assist employers in choosing the health and safety advisory service best suited to their needs and also to assist firms already using an advisory service in assessing the suitability of the service provided. Employers considering the appointment of a safety adviser are recommended to obtain Part 2 which advises on selection, training and professional standards.

3 The title 'safety adviser' used in this guidance is intended to include practitioners with titles such as safety officer, safety manager, etc.

4 Further advice for the employer may be obtained from the booklet in the health and safety series HS(G)20 *Guidelines for occupational health services* obtainable from HM Stationery Office.

Principal recommendations

5 Employers including main/management contractors, specialist and subcontractors should have access to appropriate health and safety advisory services, either within their organisations or externally. To be fully effective any such advisory service should be staffed by one or more professional safety advisers with relevant training and experience in the construction industry. The principal options are broadly:

(a) *Larger firms* (e.g. 700 or more employees) A comprehensive in-company safety department incorporating professional safety advisers and possibly other levels of safety personnel, e.g. site safety supervisors, should be available. The services of a safety consultancy may be appropriate in certain cases. Occupational physicians and nurses, hygienists and other specialists should also play an important part in making work safe and preserving health according to the needs of the firm.

(b) *Medium-sized firms* An in-company safety department on a smaller scale, incorporating one or possibly two full-time professional safety advisers. The services of a safety consultancy may be more appropriate to the needs of some employers in this size category. Health supervision will vary depending on the needs and the nature of the hazards arising from the firms' activities.

(c) *Smaller firms* (e.g. less than 60 employees) Where resources do not permit the employment of a full-time professional safety adviser, the service of a safety group, or a safety consultancy may be particularly appropriate. Safety supervisors who do not possess the experience and training of professional safety advisers and who have duties other than safety can play an important role but are unlikely to be able to provide a full advisory service without additional professional support.

Medium and small firms should also have access, where necessary, to specialist facilities of the type listed under (a) above. On sites where the main/management contractor provides a comprehensive health and safety advisory service covering all site activities, it may be appropriate for the subcontracting firms to make arrangements to use the services provided.

6 It is recommended that further safety groups are formed, so that the large number of firms who operate without any form of professional health and safety advice can share the costs and services of a safety adviser. In particular, small firms engaged in high-risk activities such as painting, roofing, demolition and steel erection are encouraged to take this course of action.

The need for health and safety advice

Statutory requirements

7 Regulation 5 of the Construction (General Provisions) Regulations 1961 specifically requires any construction firm employing more than a total of 20 people on sites to appoint in writing one or more 'safety supervisors'. The duties of such safety supervisors are defined as:

(a) advising the employer on the observance of the relevant legal requirements and on safety matters generally; and

(b) exercising general supervision of the observance of the statutory requirements and promoting the safe conduct of the work generally.

The safety supervisor should be experienced in construction work and be suitably qualified to undertake the specified duties. Further, Regulation 6 requires that any person appointed should have sufficient time available to be able to discharge the duties with reasonable efficiency and permits two or more employers to jointly appoint the same person or persons.

8 The need for advice is not confined to those companies required to appoint safety supervisors. To ensure effective compliance with statutory duties even the smallest employer is likely to need the advice of someone with detailed knowledge of the health and safety legislation relevant to the construction industry, including in particular:

(a) the Construction Regulations,* which, in addition to requiring the appointment of safety supervisors, impose extensive and detailed minimum requirements for reducing or removing many of the specific hazards faced by construction workers; and

(b) the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSW Act) which imposes wide ranging duties on employers, employees, the self-employed and others. The sections likely to be of most day-to-day relevance and importance are Section 2, which sets out the duties of employers to their employees, and Sections 3 and 4, which are concerned with the protection of non-employees including members of the public. Many employers have found that the Section 2(3) requirement to prepare and, when appropriate, revise a written safety policy, creates a special need for expert advice to assist in both preparation and effective implementation.†

9 Knowledge of the law, health and safety expertise and time are needed to fulfill the numerous legally required administrative duties, including: notification of the commencement of certain work; recording and notifying certain accidents and dangerous occurrences; ensuring that the thorough examination and testing of certain plant is carried out and the necessary records kept; revising the company safety policy as necessary and informing employees of the revisions; and administering the company safety committee where there is one. In addition, the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 give trade union appointed safety representatives the right to be informed of (and investigate) notifiable accidents, dangerous occurrences and cases of notifiable occupational ill health and also to receive copies of records and documents which the employer is required to keep by law.

Practical measures

10 To fulfill the legal duties and to ensure healthy and safe working conditions, certain practical measures need to be taken which require health and safety expertise if they are to be effective, including:

(a) *Planning* New contracts can create a variety of potential hazards which need to be identified during planning and sometimes written method statements will need to be drawn up.

(b) *Training* Both management and operatives need to be trained to ensure awareness and appreciation of hazards and to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to help prevent accidents and ill health on sites.

(c) *Identifying hazards* Site safety inspections are an essential means of identifying potential hazards, which can be obscured by job repetition, complacency and by an inability to appreciate the consequences. Site staff are likely, therefore, to need the advice of someone with training and experience in hazard identification.

(d) *Overcoming hazards* Having identified and assessed the hazards, advice will be needed on the means of overcoming them effectively and at reasonable cost, for example by: physical precautions such as safe working platforms, machinery guarding, protective clothing etc; safe systems of work; the maintenance of plant and equipment in a safe condition; and by devising rescue procedures.

(e) *Monitoring performance* To determine to what extent procedures for health and safety have succeeded, performance needs to be monitored by management. This can be done by: site inspections; accident investigation and record keeping which can reveal vital information for the prevention of future accidents; and by arranging environmental and biological monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of health precautions.

11 Applying these broad practical measures to actual day-to-day construction work, Appendix 1 gives detailed examples of the need for expert advice in relation to three common activities, excavation, scaffolding and the application of surface coatings, in the form of questions for which answers need to be sought if accidents and ill health are to be prevented.

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* The Construction (General Provisions) Regulations 1961, The Construction (Lifting Operations) Regulations 1961, The Construction (Working Places) Regulations 1966, The Construction (Health and Welfare) Regulations 1966.

† Further guidance in HSC, Construction Industry Advisory Committee Leaflet IAC/L1. *Guidance on the implementation of safety policies* obtainable from local offices of the HSE.

Meeting the need for advice

The safety adviser

12 The professional safety adviser, fully trained and experienced in construction occupational health and safety,* can in most cases provide the necessary expert advice and services including; advice on legal requirements, systems of work, the safety policy, occupational safety, health and welfare matters generally; provision of occupational safety and health information; organisation of safety training; liaison with outside bodies including the HSE; inspection of workplaces; investigation of accidents and dangerous occurrences; statutory notifications etc. The role in providing occupational health and hygiene awareness is increasing and occasions can arise where the safety adviser will identify problems requiring additional specialist expertise, such as medical or occupational hygiene which he or she should be able to call upon as necessary.

13 Safety advisers can be employed directly or through an external advisory service as described later but whatever form of advisory service is chosen, the role of the adviser in the organisation he or she serves should be clearly defined and not considered in isolation. The health and safety responsibilities of everyone in the firm, from operative to managing director, should be set out in the safety policy and all should be aware of the safety adviser's role; he or she can then form close links throughout and exert the necessary influence to ensure improved health and safety standards.

14 Although a safety adviser's job is primarily to advise, he or she should have the power to make safe imminent dangers encountered at site visits. In most cases there will be little doubt that precautions are needed and ideally an effective safety adviser should rarely have cause to exercise such power. Ultimately, line management should retain responsibility for making decisions about precautions based on the expert's advice.

15 The safety adviser's job should be set out in the form of a job description to ensure that the role is clearly and properly defined. An example of a job description, which can be developed to suit individual needs, is given in Appendix 2.

Advisory services: the in-company options

Comprehensive safety departments

16 Many large companies with the necessary resources have found the ideal advisory service to be a comprehensive safety department staffed by experienced professional safety advisers. Although the detailed organisation of such a department will vary from company to company, typically, it might comprise a senior safety adviser reporting directly to the main board director responsible for safety, backed up by a team of geographically, divisionally or subsidiary based safety advisers. In addition, a very large site may warrant the appointment of a safety adviser with full-time responsibility for that site alone. To be fully effective the safety advisers need to be given sufficient authority within the overall company organisation, for example, the senior safety adviser should be equivalent to construction manager or personnel manager and other safety advisers equivalent to site agent/manager.

17 The department should be capable of providing an advisory service to line management on occupational safety, health and hygiene matters, supplemented by additional expertise and facilities through arrangements with external bodies as appropriate.

18 The safety department should work closely with other departments within the company, for example, the design department should be able to call upon the services of the safety department to appraise the health and safety implications of a proposed project. Conversely, the safety department should be able to gain assistance from structural engineers within the company when a complex engineering problem is encountered.

19 The establishment of such a safety department may only be appropriate to the resources of the largest construction companies employing more than, say, 700 people. In medium and small companies, the composition of the health and safety advisory service should depend on the health and safety hazards arising from the firm's activities, but the principles of the comprehensive department can be applied on a less ambitious scale.

Small safety departments

20 The small safety department comprising one or two experienced professional safety advisers can provide an advisory service of similar quality, if not on the same scale, as a full advisory service. With fewer internal resources available, it may be necessary to look outside the company more often for specialist advice and services.

21 The safety adviser within such a department should be given sufficient authority to permit the duties to be carried out effectively, for example, between the levels of construction manager and site agent/manager.

22 A small safety department can be the most appropriate form of advisory service for medium-sized firms, whose sites are located in a limited geographical

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* Part 2 of this guidance covers the selection, training and professional standards of safety advisers.

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area. Such a department can also be appropriate for specialist contractors undertaking high-risk activities, e.g. steel erection, with fewer sites and employees dispersed over a wider area.

Part-time safety adviser/safety supervisor

23 It is possible to comply with the legal requirement to appoint a safety supervisor by appointing such a person on a part-time basis from within the existing workforce; the duties being coupled with the prime responsibility of, for example, the contracts manager. The effectiveness of such an arrangement will depend largely on the training given, the amount of time the person can spend on safety duties and the commitment of the employer and the individual to improving health and safety standards. Unless full training, as detailed in Part 2 of this guidance, has been received it is unlikely that the safety supervisor will have the expertise to provide an advisory service of the necessary quality.

24 In view of the limitations, this option should only be considered by smaller firms employing up to about 60 people and additional expertise should be called upon as necessary from outside the firm.

The external options

Group schemes

25 A group of smaller firms operating within a relatively small geographical area can jointly appoint a full-time professional safety adviser to share the costs. Safety groups such as those formed under the auspices of the National Federation of Building Trades Employers (NFBTE) have been in existence for a number of years and can provide a worthwhile service to employers who are unable to provide their own expertise. Typically, a safety group can be formed by taking the following steps:

(a) a number of firms within a clearly defined area should have identified the need to provide a joint health and safety advisory service;
(b) together they should form a management committee to establish a group;
(c) the committee should appoint an experienced and trained professional safety adviser;
(d) the safety adviser should then provide an advisory service appropriate to the needs of each member of the group.

26 Individual group schemes can usually provide an effective service only for sites located within a limited area. However, in some cases it is possible to make reciprocal arrangements so that member firms may use the services of another safety group if they happen to be working in that area.

Safety consultancies

27 Throughout the country there are a number of safety consultancies offering advisory services. The large consultancies can provide services tailored to the requirements of individual firms or safety groups and employ trained and experienced professional safety advisers with back-up services which include library and product files, administrative staff and access to advice on legal and occupation hygiene matters.

28 Although firms of all sizes and types, in certain cases, use safety consultants, their services can be particularly appropriate to the needs of those firms not large enough in financial terms to justify employing a full-time in-company safety adviser. The year-round nationwide service offered by the large consultancies can make this option attractive to firms operating nationally.

Assessing the effectiveness of the service

29 The effectiveness of the health and safety advisory service chosen will be dependant upon the commitment of the board to improving health and safety performance and a sustained reduction in accidents and occupational ill-health should be the main measure of success. However, care should be exercised in using this measure because when a safety adviser is first appointed a firm's accident record will often worsen on paper owing to improvements in recording procedure.

30 Other measures of success which are more difficult to assess are changes in attitude and a general increase in awareness of health and safety. In the long term, these changes should result in an overall improvement in health and safety performance and reduced costs.

31 Trade union appointed safety representatives and the company safety committee, where established, can act as continuing checks on the effectiveness of the advisory service, drawing deficiencies to the attention of senior management and suggesting improvements where appropriate.

Appendix 1 Practical examples of the need for expert advice

Some practical examples of the need for expert advice, in the form of questions for which answers need to be sought if accidents and ill-health on sites are to be prevented.

Excavations

1 Is the ground contaminated e.g. by chemicals, asbestos etc? If so, what precautions need to be taken?
2 Are underground services present? If so, how can they be traced and avoided?
3 Will the excavation affect adjacent structures/roads etc or will they affect the stability of the excavation? If so, is special shoring necessary?
4 Is the excavation to be dug to a depth that the ground conditions make a collapse of the sides likely?
5 Can the excavation be made inherently safe by battering back the sides or by arranging the work in such a way that persons do not need to enter the unsupported excavation?
6 If 5 not possible what type and design of timbering or other support is needed to prevent a collapse?
7 What system of installing the shoring is to be adopted to prevent risk to the person installing it?
8 Having installed the shoring who will carry out the regular checks to ensure the continued stability of the excavation? Is the person chosen competent to do so?
9 What precautions are to be taken to prevent persons and/or vehicles falling into the excavation?

Scaffolding

1 What type of scaffold is to be used e.g. independent tied, putlog, tower, suspended, slung?
2 Having chosen the type, what design factors should be borne in mind to ensure that the scaffold is safe e.g. width and spacing of working platforms, ground conditions, anticipated loadings, tying-in, protection of persons from falling objects, safe access to and from working platforms?
3 At what stages should the scaffold be erected and dismantled to maximise its use?
4 Who is to erect and dismantle the scaffolding and is he competent?
5 What systems of erection and dismantling are to be used and are they safe, taking into account persons at ground level?
6 What arrangements are to be made in relation to alterations to the scaffold when in use?
7 Who will regularly inspect and record the condition of the scaffold and is the person competent to do so?
8 What arrangements are to be made for the quality checking of components before and after use?

Application of surface coatings

1 What working platforms together with access are to be provided? (see **Scaffolding** above)
2 What, if any, are the short and long term health risks associated with the coating material e.g. dermatitis, respiratory affects?
3 What concentration of any hazardous component is likely to be produced during application and on the basis of this assessment will atmospheric monitoring be needed?
4 Who is to assess and decide upon the following and hence formulate a safe system of work?
(a) choice of protective clothing e.g. gloves, eye protection;
(b) means of preventing the inhalation of hazardous concentrations of vapour, including an assessment of the effectiveness of natural ventilation and whether forced ventilation would be appropriate; if such ventilation would not be suitable what form of respiratory protection will be used?
(c) training and instruction needed for operatives on care and use of equipment;
(d) precautions for other persons not directly involved in the work e.g. barriers, warning notices; and
(e) safe disposal of any waste chemicals.

5 If the surface coating is highly flammable, what storage arrangements are to be provided and what modifications to the safe system of work are necessary to take the flammability into account?
6 If isocyanates are present, e.g. in two-pack polyurethane paints or sprayed polyurethane insulation foams, what arrangements are to be made for medical supervision in view of the sensitization risks e.g. pre-employment and routine periodic medical examinations?

Appendix 2 Example of job description

Extract from CITB Training Recommendations 'Safety officers in construction TR13'

Title

Company safety officer

Function

Advising

Safety and health policy and organisation.

Management

Implementation of accident prevention and health and hygiene control measures. Current and new legislation.

Relationships

Responsible to

Managing Director/General Manager (or Chief Safety Officer)

Subordinates

Assistant Safety Officer
Seconded staff under training
Seconded clerical staff

Persons dealing with the function of:

Design
Estimating and planning
Production
Service
Plant
Training
Personnel
Medical and occupation nursing

External contacts

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)/Inspectorate
Employment Medical Advisory Service (EMAS)
Company insurers
Fire authority
Police
Employers' organisations
Subcontractors
Trade unions
Industrial training boards
Local government authorities
Education establishments
Safety organisations
Group training officers
Relevant research organisations
Red Cross
St. Johns Ambulance Brigade
Local hospitals

Control of resources

Personnel

Own staff engagement, induction, utilisation, discipline, welfare and training in accordance with company policy and procedures.

Financial

Control of safety department budget, and expenditure within limits laid down by company policy.

Objectives

(a) To monitor the effectiveness of the company safety policy in respect of the health and safety at work of its employees, members of the public and those others affected by the work, including its administration and organisation.
(b) The monitoring and assessment of the overall effect of the safety policy.
(c) Improve the company's safety performance.
(d) Enhance the company's reputation in accident prevention.
(e) Create within the company a positive safety and health awareness and attitude at all levels of employees from directors to operatives.

Responsibilities

(a) Advising management on:
  (i) The identification of risks and dangers associated with:
    — injury or ill health to personnel
    — damage to plant, equipment, materials
    — fire and explosion.
  (ii) Improvement of existing working by the introduction of safe systems of work.
  (iii) Legal requirements affecting safety, health and hygiene and welfare.
  (iv) Provision and use of protective clothing and equipment.
  (v) Safety-suitability of new and hired plant and equipment, and ensuring all appropriate test certificates and technical instructions are obtained.
  (vi) Potential hazards on new contracts before work starts and on the site safety organisation required.
  (vii) New methods of safe working arising from current technological development.
  (viii) Changes in legislation.
  (ix) Appropriate fire and rescue procedures.
(b) Carrying out site surveys (in association with the site agent or general foreman) to ensure that all regulations are being observed; statutory notices have been posted; only safe systems of working are in operation; mess rooms, washing facilities and other welfare amenities have been provided and are properly maintained.
(c) Investigating the cause of any accidents or dangerous occurrence and recommending means of preventing recurrence.

(d) Supervising the recording and analysis of information on injuries, ill-health, damage and production losses; assessing accident trends and reviewing overall safety performances.

(e) Assisting with training for all levels of employee, and suggesting methods, slides, films and film strips to promote general awareness of injury prevention and damage control.

(f) Keeping contact with official and professional bodies, e.g. HSE, EMAS, fire authority, local government authorities, Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, voluntary organisations.

(g) Liaison with safety representatives and safety committees and assisting in management/operative consultations.

(h) Fostering, within the firm, an understanding that injury prevention and damage control are an integral part of business and operational effficiency.

(i) Keeping up to date with recommended codes of practice and new safety literature; circulating the relevant information to each level of employee.

(j) Preparing budgets and obtaining approval for funds to implement policies as related to safety, health and welfare. Controlling and accounting for these funds.

(k) Liaison with client's representatives and subcontractors at times of joint responsibilities. Checking of safety policies. Monitoring and advising as necessary on safety matters related to their operations.

(l) Liaison with employer's insurance company(s).

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